



NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

## Department of Counseling and Higher Education

*College of Education*

April 12, 2023

Office of Faculty Senate  
Northern Illinois University  
DeKalb, IL 60115

### **Re: AY22-23 Summary of Service – Carrie Kortegast**

Dear Dr. Montana and NIU Faculty Senate:

On October 26, 2022, I was elected by Faculty Senate to serve in the role of Faculty Personnel Advisor (FPA). As the position was currently vacant, I agreed to begin the position on November 16, 2022, rather than at the start of spring semester. In transitioning into this position, I met with Brian Smith, Director of Employee Assistance and Sandra Cox, Ombudsperson, to discuss the role of the FPA as well as to discuss employee resources at NIU.

Between November 16, 2022 and April 12, 2023, I provided assistance to seven individual faculty members. This included 48 email exchanges and 6 meetings. The nature of the assistance included sharing campus resources for managing interpersonal conflict, clarifying policies regarding course scheduling, sabbatical requests, and disability accommodations, as well as discussing incidents of perceived discrimination and retaliation. For three cases, I was able to assist via email as the nature of the inquiry was informational and/or clarification of policies.

For the other four cases, we exchanged multiple emails and met virtually to discuss their situations and concerns. The four individuals were all tenured faculty contacting me because they were experiencing micro/macroaggressions, discrimination, and/or perceived retaliation in their departments. During these meetings, I provided support, advice, and discussed potential responses. When appropriate, I also referred individuals to the Ombudsperson, Employee Assistance, and/or Human Resources.

In my letter of interest to Faculty Senate, I stated that I would engage in outreach efforts to make myself know and available to faculty. With that, I was able to present to Faculty Senate on February 22, 2023 about the role of the FPA. I also shared a handout to be distributed to faculty. The handout included information about the FPA position and how I can provide assistance to all faculty, regardless of rank and title. As I continue in this position, I hope to engage in additional outreach efforts.

NIU leadership, Faculty Senate, the faculty unions, and many individual colleges and departments have indicated commitments to creating more inclusive, equitable, and supportive workplaces for faculty, staff, and students. Moreover, some of the most consequential decisions we make as a university and within our own departments and colleges are those related to personnel matters. Ensuring that at the center of all personnel decisions is a fair and equitable

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process in which policies and procedures were followed is important. However, policies are often not enough.

The larger scholarly literature on academic and faculty cultures includes well documented cases of discrimination for women, people of color, LGBTQ individuals, people with disabilities, and individuals with other minoritized identities. There is also well documented literature on academic bullying and toxic academic cultures that foster mistrust, unkindness, and inequity. While I would not characterize the university in this light, there are pockets of concern within individual programs, departments, and colleges. From the individuals I have worked with during the past five months as well as through my interactions with other NIU faculty members over the course of my NIU career, there are areas in the university in which these behaviors are manifesting and festering.

Given the nature of faculty work and the hierarchical structure, interpersonal dynamics are often difficult to manage and address. At the same time, these interpersonal dynamics often have a differential impact on individuals' wellness, health, and quality of work. Moreover, these dynamics can inequitably influence individuals' careers and livelihoods. Current efforts to focus on policies and written documents through an equity lens is important and necessary work. However, policies are not enough. There is a need for more support, educational workshops, and professional development on how to navigate interpersonal issues, work through conflict, as well as how to not engage in discriminatory practices.

Lastly, academic and professional standards related to rigor and quality can be maintained without treating people unkindly in the process. We can develop strategies to maintain dignity and respect while still upholding standards, policies, and responsibilities. Perhaps, more messaging and attention needs to focus on this.

Thank you for the honor of serving in this position. Please let me know if you have any questions about the contents of this report. I look forward to continuing in this role for the next academic year.

Sincerely,

Carrie Kortegast, Ph.D.  
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